

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

Fauquier County's bucolic landscapes, quaint towns, and various historic, natural and cultural resources provide an ideal setting for bicycling, walking, horseback riding and canoeing. County residents have expressed a desire to preserve greenway corridors throughout the County, both to improve water quality and environmental conditions, as well as to serve as recreational corridors. Bicycling in the region is growing in popularity, and county residents are increasingly looking for places where they can safely walk to improve their health as well as for recreation.

Greenways and bikeways also will help to preserve and enhance the social values that Fauquier County holds dear. Greenways offer an opportunity to slow down and greet a neighbor, a chance to reinforce our connection with nature, and a safe place that people of all ages and abilities can experience.

This Plan provides a coordinated and strategic approach to the development of a regional system of greenways and bikeways throughout the County. The Plan meets the goals of the region to create a comprehensive network that connects neighborhoods, adjacent jurisdictions, and key destination points.



The Importance of Greenways and Bikeways in Fauquier County

Fauquier County is a popular place to settle as well as to visit because of the region's natural beauty, access to outdoor activities, and abundance of historic and cultural resources. Recent growth has created dramatic changes in transportation and land use. Roadways throughout the region are experiencing increases in traffic, thus causing concerns that they are less safe for walking and bicycling.

Efforts should be made now to ensure that people on foot and bicycle will be able to use Fauquier County's roadway network in the future. Transportation improvements must be designed to preserve the ability for people to walk and bicycle for recreation and transportation throughout Fauquier County.

There are a variety of reasons why greenways and bikeways are important in Fauquier County:

#1: More greenways and increased levels of walking and bicycling will help to preserve rural landscapes in Fauquier County, and will improve air and water quality.

- By protecting open space areas, or greenways, along the County's stream and river corridors, water quality can be greatly improved. Greenways act to filter runoff and reduce flooding by slowing the release of stormwater into floodplains.
- Greenways provide opportunities to protect the County's rural open space areas by preserving sensitive ecological lands. In locations where public access is appropriate, some greenways can also provide access for canoeing, hiking and horseback riding.
- Vehicle emissions and other motor vehicle pollutants contribute to water pollution, which ends up in Fauquier County's streams, the Rappahannock River and the Chesapeake Bay. Increased levels of walking and bicycling will have a positive impact on local and regional water quality, and greenways help to filter pollutants from runoff.
- Fauquier County will soon be classified as being in non-attainment for ground level ozone by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This means that air quality in the region is below federal health-based standards for clean air. Motor vehicle emissions are a major contributor to ozone pollution.
- Increased levels of walking and bicycling can play an important role in reducing air pollution. 48.8% of all trips we make are less than 3 miles in length. By substituting a bicycling or walking trip for these short auto trips to the nearby grocery store or workplace, area residents can impact the amount of pollutants generated by automobiles. Sixty percent of the pollution created by automobile emissions is emitted in the first few minutes of operation, before pollution control devices begin to work effectively.

#2: Walking and bicycling can play a vital role in improving the health of residents of Fauquier County.

- Residents of Fauquier County need opportunities to meet the Surgeon General's recommendation of 30 minutes of physical activity per day. Efforts to integrate physical activity into people's daily routines (such as opportunities to walk and bicycle) are critically important (1998 report of the American Medical Association).
- Today, there are nearly twice as many overweight children and almost three times as many overweight adolescents in the U.S. as there were in 1980. In Virginia, the prevalence of obesity increased by 100% between 1991 and 2001, going from 10 percent to 20 percent in ten years.
- Research conducted in 1999 by the Centers for Disease Control found



that “obesity and overweight are linked to the nation’s number one killer - heart disease - as well as diabetes and other chronic conditions”. The report also states that one reason for Americans’ sedentary lifestyle is that “walking and cycling have been replaced by automobile travel for all but the shortest distances.” (October 1999 issue of the JAMA - Journal of the American Medical Association).

- Total costs attributed to obesity (medical costs and lost productivity) amounted to an estimated \$117 billion in the year 2000, 10% of total national health care costs.

#3: Increased walking and bicycling in Fauquier County for transportation can help to reduce traffic congestion, while also providing a recreational resource.

- Walking for fitness or recreation has consistently been ranked as the number one outdoor recreational activity by U.S. adults for the past decade, and bicycling has been consistently ranked among the top ten activities. These trends are evident in the outstanding popularity of the Warrenton Branch Trail - an average of 89,000 people use the trail each year.
- Many people in the region need an alternative mode of travel. Because of age or economic circumstances, some of the region’s residents - children, students, low-income households and retirees - do not have access to an automobile. Bicycling is an extremely affordable option when compared to the expense of owning and operating an automobile (\$120 per year compared to over \$5,000 per year).
- The county’s residents will be more likely to use bicycles for transportation if there are safe places to ride. A 1990 Louis Harris Poll found that 40% of U.S. adults say they would commute by bike if bike lanes and pathways were available.

#4: Developing a trails and bikeways network makes good economic sense for Fauquier County.

- Trails can provide a significant boost to the local economy. Several local jurisdictions expect to see additional tourism revenues from the development of trails: for example, equestrians and canoeists who enhance their visit to the Rappahannock by eating lunch in Remington. Several recent economic impact studies of trails in the Mid-Atlantic have shown that multi-use trails bring significant revenue to local small businesses and Towns. A 2004 study of the Northern Central Rail Trail (a 21-mile unpaved trail in Maryland) found that the annual revenues from the purchase of hard goods, soft goods and



accommodations was approximately \$10.3 million. A trail user count conducted by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources estimated a total of 867,725 user visits to the Northern Central Rail Trail in 2004.

- Bicycle touring is a low impact tourist activity that can bring dollars to many small town businesses, museums, and other cultural institutions, but does not generate overwhelming numbers of cars or people. Realizing economic benefit from appropriate use of rural road resources and trails coincides with the region's desire to maintain its rural nature and quality of life.
- Bicycle tourism is big business in the United States, bringing millions of dollars in tourism revenue to some parts of the country. In Vermont, for example, bicycle touring brings in more revenue than the maple syrup industry. A questionnaire of Delaware cyclists in 1997 found that bicycle tourists were willing to spend between \$35.59 and \$84.77 per day, with the amount increasing as the number of days touring increases.
- Fauquier County has a multitude of outdoor activities to offer visitors in addition to bicycling, such as hiking (Appalachian Trail is located in the region), camping, horseback riding and canoeing. The region has an opportunity to build a reputation as a destination for people seeking an active vacation.

Policy Context

By far, the most efficient way to improve conditions for walking and bicycling is to incorporate greenways, bikeways, sidewalks and safe crossings into community design from the outset. It is far more expensive to retrofit pedestrian and bicycle facilities into communities that were only designed for automobile access. Therefore the concept of "complete streets" has gained a tremendous amount of support in recent years. Complete streets are those that are designed for all users - people who drive automobiles, people who bicycle, people with disabilities, and people who travel on foot.

Policies have been adopted at all levels of government in order to ensure that land is preserved for greenways, and that communities are designed to support walking and bicycling. Below is a description of the policies that are most relevant to this Plan.

Federal Policies and Regulations

Federal transportation policies (through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1990 as well as subsequent transportation bills) strongly support the inclusion of pedestrian and bicycle facilities in transportation projects, and have supplied a consistent source of funding for these activities for the past fifteen years. The federal requirements for the provision of pedestrian and bicycle facilities are very detailed, and can be found in Appendix A.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, one in every five Americans has a disability. People with disabilities are more likely to be pedestrians than other adults because some physical limitations can make driving difficult.

For these reasons, the U.S. Government established the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. Its implementing regulations, issued by the Department of Justice (DOJ) in 1991, require that all new and altered facilities - including sidewalks, street crossings and related pedestrian facilities in the public right-of-way - be accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. The Americans With Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) provide the necessary guidance for the design and construction of pedestrian facilities.

State Recreation and Transportation Policies

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

This Plan is clearly in line with statewide recreation goals, as set forward in the recommendations of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) *2002 Virginia Outdoors Plan*. DCR identified the need to provide "transportation alternatives, specifically trails for walking, hiking and cycling and to connect people with destinations."

This Plan is also supported by a variety of land preservation programs that are available in Virginia, including the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program. This program enables local governments to develop and enact an easement program to preserve open spaces, farms, forests and natural areas, and restrict future development of the land while permitting landowners to continue to use their land as they had been. While this program will not support public access for trail development, it will ensure that greenway lands (i.e. environmental buffers and wildlife areas) are preserved in the future.

The Open-Space Land Act enables public bodies to acquire properties or interests in property, or designate property for use as open-space land. "Open-space land" means any land provided or preserved for

- park or recreational purposes
- conservation of land or other natural resources
- historic or scenic purposes
- assisting in the shaping of the character, direction, and timing of community development, or
- wetlands

Public bodies may also acquire fee simple title or other interests in real property including easements for the conservation of farm and forestlands. (Information above was obtained from the DCR website.)



Virginia Department of Transportation

As described above under Federal policies, transportation agencies have also provided a tremendous level of support and funding for bikeways, greenways and sidewalks. While local jurisdictions play a large role in establishing transportation priorities in Virginia, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is the agency responsible for constructing and maintaining many of the primary and secondary roads throughout the Commonwealth.

On March 18, 2004 the Commonwealth Transportation Board adopted a new state policy for integrating pedestrian and bicycle accommodations into roadway projects (often termed “incidental” improvements - bikeways and sidewalks that are built as part of new roadway construction or roadway reconstruction). This policy essentially reverses previous VDOT policies which required a great deal of public and political support in order for bikeways and sidewalks to be *considered* for inclusion in transportation projects.

The new policy states that *“VDOT will initiate all highway construction projects with the presumption that the projects shall accommodate bicycling and walking.”* The policy provides a number of factors under which additional emphasis will be placed on the need for such facilities, essentially requiring bikeways and sidewalks whenever a roadway project occurs in an urban or suburban area. The policy provides some exemptions under which facilities may *not* be provided, such as in situations where:

- scarcity of population, travel, and attractors, both existing and future, indicate an absence of need for such accommodations
- environmental or social impacts outweigh the need for these accommodations
- safety would be compromised
- total cost of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations to the appropriate system (i.e., interstate, primary, secondary, or urban system) would be excessively disproportionate to the need for the facility
- purpose and scope of the specific project do not facilitate the provision of such accommodations (e.g., projects for the Rural Rustic Road Program)
- pedestrian and bicycle travel is prohibited by state or federal laws

This policy also pertains to operations and maintenance, and specifically states the following in Section 3.3.1:

“Bicycling and walking should be considered in operational improvements, including hazard elimination projects and signal installation. Independent operational improvements for bicycling and walking, such as the installation of pedestrian signals, should be coordinated with local transportation and safety offices. The maintenance program will consider bicycling and walking so that

completed activities will not hinder the movement of those choosing to use these travel modes. The maintenance program may produce facility changes that will enhance the environment for bicycling and walking, such as the addition of paved shoulders.”

VDOT’s new policy went into effect on March 18, 2004 and applies to all projects that reached the scoping phase after that date. As with all major policy changes, it will take several years before the “on the ground” results of VDOT’s new policy will be evident, as projects move through the pipeline from initial scoping, through the planning and design phases and eventually into construction.

It is critical that local governments continue to show support for the inclusion of pedestrian and bicycle accommodations in state roadway projects. This includes projects at all levels: maintenance, design and construction, and operations. The level of accommodation provided in VDOT projects is likely to be commiserate with the level of support expressed by local citizens, agency staff and elected officials.

The complete version of VDOT’s *Policy for Integrating Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations* can be found on the VDOT website (www.virginiadot.org) in the Program section of the website, under Bicycling and Walking.

Local Policies

The Fauquier County Subdivision Ordinance (as amended October 14, 2004) has a mixture of good provisions for pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as a number of factors that have been overlooked and are in need of revision. (A full review and list of recommendations with regards to the Subdivision Ordinance is provided in Chapter 5 and the Appendix of this report.) The ordinance does not specifically address the provision of greenways during commercial and residential development, however it does require sidewalks on both sides of newly constructed roadways. Subdivision ordinances for towns in Fauquier County are generally less detailed with regards to provision of multi-use trails and sidewalks.

Another considerable issue with regards to local policies is Fauquier County Public Schools’ policy that prohibits students from walking or bicycling to school. This policy is the opposite direction of what other local governments throughout the U.S. are doing - developing Safe Routes to Schools programs so that students can walk and bicycle safely, in order to address the problem of childhood obesity, and reduce traffic congestion and air pollution around schools. This policy will also make the County ineligible for future Safe Routes to Schools funding grants (see Chapter 5 Recommendations regarding this policy).

Planning Context

There are a number of local plans and policy documents in Fauquier County that support the development of a Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenways Plan, including:

- **Fauquier County Comprehensive Plan 1992-2010**
 The goals of the Fauquier County Comprehensive Plan 1992-2010 are consistent with this Plan. Chapter 9 of the Comprehensive Plan offers guidance for future infrastructure needs including parks recreational facilities. The Comprehensive Plan directed each Service District to develop a trails plan, which has since been accomplished. The Service District trails plans were the basis for the development of the maps that are provided in Chapter 5.
- **Fauquier County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan - 1989**
 This Plan established the goals of developing a greenway system and a network of trails countywide. In the intervening years, county staff implemented these goals by working with citizens to develop trail networks within the Service Districts; initiating a proffer system that incorporates greenways and trails into the development process; and constructing, in cooperation with the Town of Warrenton, the County's first Rail-to-Trail project with grant money.
- **Fauquier County Parks and Recreation Policies and Standards**
 The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan contains a department standards manual that addresses various parks and recreation amenities such as playground equipment and ball fields.
- **Town of Warrenton Comprehensive Plan**
 The Town of Warrenton's Comprehensive Plan contains a greenway element, which supports the goals of this Plan.

The adoption of this Plan also contributes to regional efforts to improve walking and bicycling conditions throughout the Piedmont region of Virginia. This Plan is well timed to coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions, in order to achieve connections that go well beyond Fauquier County's boundaries. The following efforts were either in progress or recently completed during the timeframe of this master planning process, in jurisdictions either adjacent to or near Fauquier County:

- **Northern Virginia Regional Bikeways and Trails Study** - This Virginia Department of Transportation study establishes a regional network of roads for bikeway development in Fairfax County, Prince William County, Loudoun County, Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. This Plan identifies transportation corridors for bicycles

between major activity centers, and establishes an Action Plan for the region to support higher levels of bicycling.

- **Loudoun County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility Master Plan** - Loudoun County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility Plan was approved by the Board of Supervisors on October 20, 2003. It identifies a countywide network of recommended bikeways and walkways to connect citizens in Loudoun to parks, schools, jobs, shopping areas and rural open space. Information about the plan, including the plan document, maps, and background on the project, is available at www.loudoun.gov/compplan/bikeped.htm.
- **Culpepper Bikeways Plan** - this plan identifies three connections to Fauquier County: along Highways 29, 211 and 802. Culpepper County also shares Fauquier County's vision to provide a blueway on the Rappahannock River.
- **Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission (PD9) Regional Bike Plan** - this plan is slated to commence in FY '06, and will address bicycling throughout the region. It will be conducted under the direction of the Board of the Commission, and in conjunction with VDOT Transportation Mobility & Planning under the Rural Transportation Planning Program.
- **Central Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Plan** - this regional plan spans the five counties that comprise the Central Shenandoah Valley: Rockingham, Augusta, Rockbridge, Bath and Highland Counties, as well as the local jurisdictions of Staunton, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Waynesboro and Buena Vista. This Plan focuses primarily on bicycle transportation in the urban and suburban areas of the Central Shenandoah Valley, and on bicycle touring in the rural areas. A network of roadway corridors are identified in the Draft Plan for improvements that will include paved shoulders, bike lanes, and trails. Copies of the draft Plan can be obtained from the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission.
- **Frederick County** - The Frederick County Parks and Recreation Department is developing several off-road trails in Winchester.
- **Fairfax County** - Fairfax County's Countywide Trails Plan (2002) identifies the general location of proposed public trails for non-motorized users.

To the extent possible, the findings of the above-mentioned studies and master plans were coordinated with the planning process for this Plan.

Planning Process

The planning process for this study involved a number of different activities and outreach efforts. The process is briefly outlined below.

1. *Field Analysis*

An analysis of existing conditions was conducted in the field for key areas of Fauquier County. This analysis included existing conditions on multi-use trails, potential locations for future greenways, sidewalk and pedestrian crossing conditions, and on-road bicycling conditions throughout the County.

2. *Public and Jurisdiction Input*

A considerable effort was undertaken to gather input for this Plan from residents and key stakeholders from each of the nine Service Districts. The public input process was an essential component in selecting locations for improvements. Each service district appointed a citizen committee to update the comprehensive plan for their particular community. As part of this effort, citizens made recommendations for future locations of greenways and trails, as well as on-road pedestrian and bicycle improvements. The adopted Service District Plans are incorporated into this plan. In addition, advocacy groups like the Fauquier Trails Coalition provided public input on the extension of trails throughout the county to create an integrated system.

3. *Draft and Final Plan and Route Network*

This Plan was reviewed by the Connections Plan Focus Group, whose members represent a wide variety of user groups throughout the County. Based on their comments, the Plan was revised. It was then reviewed by the public in a series of public hearings during its adoption, including a Planning Commission Public Hearing, a Parks and Recreation Board Public Hearing, and a Board of Supervisors Public Hearing.

It is intended, upon its adoption, that this Plan will become a component of Fauquier County's Comprehensive Plan.

Conclusion

This Plan has grown out of public concerns that greenways should be preserved, and that walking and bicycling conditions in the County need a greater level of attention in order to be safe activities. It was also the result of citizens who are concerned that open space areas in the County are preserved and connected. The remainder of this Plan describes how to accomplish this.

Chapter 3 outlines a *Vision* for Fauquier County's greenway network and identifies five key goals that form the foundation of this vision. Chapter 4 describes existing conditions and the extent of existing facilities. Chapter 5 outlines the recommended policy actions that will be needed to improve walking and bicycling conditions and provide a safe and effective bikeway and walkway network. It addresses roadway design policies, land development policies, and network maintenance and

management. Chapter 6 provides recommendations for support programs that will be needed, such as pedestrian and bicycle safety education. Chapter 7 provides a guide for plan implementation.